CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

5 1. A method for authenticating a document, comprising the steps of:

generating a document key by examining one or more physical attributes of a physical media that underlies the document;

- imparting an original image onto the physical media such that the original image enables recovery of the document key.
- 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of imparting comprises the steps of:

generating a digital signature using the document key and a private key that corresponds to the document;

encoding the digital signature into the original image.

- 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of imparting comprises the step of printing the document key on the physical media (as the original image).
- 4. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of recording the document key along with a description of the document.
- 30 5. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of verifying the document by performing the steps of:

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generating the document key by examining the physical attributes of the physical media;

obtaining a recovered document key from the original image;

- 5 comparing the document key to the recovered document key.
- The method of claim 1, wherein the step of generating a document key comprises the step of
 examining paper fiber patterns in the physical media.
 - 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of examining paper fiber patterns comprises the step of examining paper fiber patterns in each of a set of predetermined areas of the physical media.
 - 8. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of imparting comprises the steps of:

generating a digital signature using the

document key and a shared secret key that corresponds
to the document;

encoding the digital signature into the original image.

- 9. The method of claim 1, wherein the physical media is paper.
 - 10. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of generating a document key comprises the step of examining density differences of the physical media.
 - 11. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of generating a document key comprises the step of

examining a unique pattern imparted in the physical media.

- 12. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of examining a unique pattern comprises the step of examining a pattern of a reflective substance in the physical media.
- 13. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of examining a unique pattern comprises the step of examining a pattern of UV ink in the physical media.
- 14. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of examining a unique pattern comprises the step of examining a set of predetermined shapes printed in predetermined positions on the physical media.
- 15. The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of measuring the predetermined positions and encoding the predetermined in the document key.
 - 16. An apparatus for authenticating a document, comprising:

imager that generates a set of pixel data values in response to a document;

document key generator that generates a document key by examining the pixel data values to detect one or more physical attributes of a physical media that underlies the document thereby enabling the document key to be imparted in an original image onto the

document.

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17. An apparatus for authenticating a document, comprising:

imager that generates a set of pixel data values
in response to a document;

document key generator that generates a document key by examining the pixel data values to detect one or more physical attributes of a physical media that underlies the document thereby enabling the document key to be compared to a recovered document key obtained from the document.

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